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UNCLAS BANGKOK 002665

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SUBJECT: ANTI-TERRORIST MEASURE -- RTG REQUIRES ID FOR
TELEPHONE CARD PURCHASES

REF: BANGKOK 2441

1. (U) Summary: In an effort to thwart or identify and arrest separatist bombers, the RTG intends to require that buyers of mobile phone SIM cards show their national ID cards to register the purchase. Following the bombings in Hat Yai and other locations in the south recently, the RTG is eager to show its determination to track down the perpetrators. Critics question the effectiveness of the measures. End summary.

SUSPECTED USE OF MOBILE PHONES BY BOMBERS LEADS TO
RESTRICTIONS BY RTG

2. (SBU) The RTG announced on April 17 that buyers of mobile telephone SIMs cards will have to produce either a national identification card or a passport at the time of purchase. In addition, according to press reports, all 21.5 million existing prepaid Thai and foreign mobile phone system users in the country will be required to report their citizen identification or their passport numbers to their phone operators within six months. Phone services will be canceled by the government if users do not meet the registration deadline. The decision to regulate the use of SIM cards for prepaid mobile phones was reportedly made in response to Prime Minister Thaksin's instructions at the April 12 cabinet meeting following the April 3 Hat Yai Airport bombing, in which Thai authorities believe separatists detonated an improvised explosive device using a mobile telephone.

3. (SBU) The new requirements were reportedly reached on April 17 at a meeting chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Police General Chidchai Vanasatidya and attended by top security officials such as Defense Minister Thammarak Issarangkura, National Security Council Secretary General General Winai Phattiyakul, National Intelligence Director Jumpol Manmai and Police Commissioner-General Kovit Wattana, as well as officials from the Information and Communications Technology Ministry (ICT).

THAKSIN SAYS NEW REQUIREMENTS STRICTLY SECURITY-RELATED

4. (U) Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra told reporters that the campaign to trace SIMs card users is intended to follow and locate bombers quickly but must not undermine the users' privacy. An ICT Ministry official told reporters that the RTG is actively seeking the cooperation of service providers nationwide in the registration effort. This will theoretically prevent potential saboteurs from buying cards in peaceful areas of the country to use in the troubled provinces. With Cabinet endorsement, the ICT Ministry is expected to draw up the requirements as ministerial regulations which will then be signed by the ICT Minister and published in the Government Gazette.

HOW EFFECTIVE?

5. (SBU) Comment: In the wake of the bombings at Hat Yai airport and several other locations in the south earlier this month (reftel), the RTG is eager to show that it is taking measures to track down the perpetrators. It is hard to see how this effort will have an impact on the use of bombs in the south. Already critics are being heard. National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) member and Muslim scholar Asmadsonboon Bualuang complains that the measure does nothing to resolve the overall situation in the south. Bangkok Senator Seri Suwananond reacted to the measure by saying that forged documents (and Bangkok is the center of an international document forgery industry) will simply be used by separatist bombers to purchase phone cards for use in detonating improvised explosive devices. With virtually all of these unknown persons who have set off bombs in the southern border provinces over the past year still at large, we expect the bombings to continue.

BOYCE